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(54) One-chip integrated sensor

(57) A method concurrently forms a micromachine element (54) and an integrated circuit device (12) on the same substrate (18), such that their fabrication requires a minimal number of processing steps. The method can form sensing devices, such as accelerometers (110) and pressure sensors (54) which utilise a small micromachine element, such as a bridge (54), cantilevered beam,

suspended mass (60), membrane or capacitive element that is supported over a cavity (22) formed in the silicon substrate (18). Piezoresistors (14) used to detect the deflection of the micromachine element (54, 60) are formed simultaneously with elements of the integrated circuit devices (12), such that a minimal number of processing steps are required.

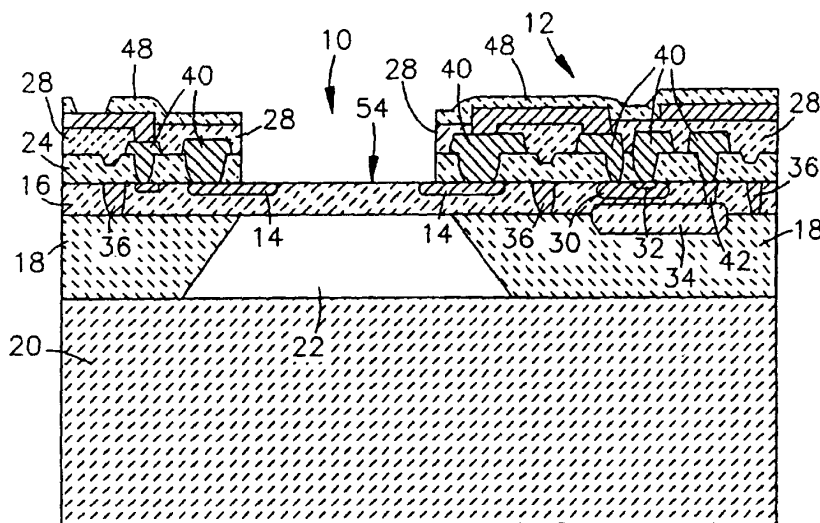


FIG.1

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Description

The present invention generally relates to bulk micromachining processes used to form integrated circuit devices on or under the surface of a silicon wafer. More particularly, this invention relates to an improved method for micromachining integrated sensor elements on the surface of a silicon wafer which may incorporate bipolar, CMOS or BiCMOS devices, in which the processes by which the micromachine elements are formed may be fully integrated into the bipolar, CMOS or BiCMOS process.

Techniques for bulk micromachining silicon wafers are well known in the semiconductor arts. Generally, this process involves forming semiconductor devices in a silicon wafer by etching the bulk silicon at the surface of the wafer, in contrast to etching methods in which semiconductor devices are formed by selectively etching layers which were previously deposited on the surface of the wafer substrate. Bulk micromachining can be used to form micromachined features in the surface of a silicon substrate from which sensing elements can be formed.

Bulk micromachine sensing elements are generally superior to sensing elements formed by etching deposited layers, in that less warpage occurs with bulk micromachine elements, thereby enhancing the accuracy of the sensing device. Sensors fabricated by bulk micromachining methods are also often preferred to those fabricated by known stacked-wafer techniques, in that the residual stresses and stress concentrators common to stacked-wafer sensors can generally be avoided.

An example of a bulk micromachining method is disclosed in EP-A-624,900, which teaches a method which encompasses a minimal number of processing steps. The method is particularly suitable for forming a sensing device that includes a small micromachine element, such as a bridge, cantilevered beam, suspended mass, membrane or capacitive element, which is supported over a cavity formed in a silicon substrate. The method enables the formation of a wide variety of sensing devices on a single silicon wafer, as well as enables the device to be formed adjacent and on the same substrate as an integrated circuit used to process the signals from the device. As a result, the process taught by EP-A-624,900 enables a sensing device to be up-integrated with its processing circuitry.

However, the teachings of EP-A-624,900 do not provide for a method by which a micromachined sensing element can be fabricated concurrently with an integrated circuit on a single chip. While the additional steps required to form an integrated circuit prior to or subsequent to the formation of the micromachine element are generally conventional, it is a continuous objective in the semiconductor industry to minimise the number of processing steps necessary to form any given device.

The present invention seeks to provide an improved integrated sensor.

According to an aspect of the present invention, there is provided a method of forming a one-chip integrated sensor as specified in claim 1.

It is possible to provide an improved method for forming small, integrated micromachine elements in a silicon wafer using a bulk micromachining process which concurrently forms an integrated circuit device on the same silicon wafer, so as to significantly reduce the number of processing steps necessary to form the micromachine element and its corresponding integrated circuitry.

The preferred method can form a small micromachine element within the silicon wafer which is suitable for use as a component of a semiconductor sensing device. This method can require a minimal number of processing steps to form the micromachine element, while simultaneously enabling an integrated circuit device to be concurrently formed on the same silicon wafer.

Various types of sensing devices can be formed, having a wide variety of physical configurations.

The preferred embodiment provides a method for concurrently forming a micromachine element and an integrated circuit device on the same substrate, such that fabrication of the micromachine element and the circuit device requires a minimal number of processing steps. More particularly, this method is adapted for forming sensing devices, such as accelerometers and pressure sensors which utilise a small micromachine element, such as a bridge, cantilevered beam, suspended mass, membrane or capacitive element, that is supported within or above a cavity formed in the silicon substrate.

In this embodiment, piezoresistors used to detect the deflection of the micromachine element are formed simultaneously with elements of the integrated circuit devices, such that a minimal number of processing steps are required to form a one-chip integrated sensing device.

Generally, as applied to bipolar processes, the preferred method involves forming an N-type epitaxial silicon layer on a first surface of a suitable substrate, and then simultaneously growing a first field oxide layer on the epitaxial silicon layer and a second field oxide layer on the opposite surface of the substrate. Since piezoresistive sensing elements are preferably formed by this method, the substrate is preferably formed from a [100] p-type wafer. If the circuit device being formed is an NPN bipolar transistor, the epitaxial silicon layer forms the collector for the circuit device. If the circuit device being formed is a lateral PNP bipolar transistor, the epitaxial silicon layer serves to form the base for the circuit device.

Two or more P+ regions are preferably then formed in the epitaxial silicon layer so as to form another element of the integrated circuit device and one or more piezoresistors for the micromachined sensing element. If the circuit device being formed is an NPN transistor, one of the P+ regions forms a base of the circuit device. If the circuit device being formed is a lateral PNP transistor, two P+ regions serve to form the emitter and collector for the circuit device. An N+ region is then formed in the epitaxial

silicon layer so as to form yet another element of the integrated circuit device - an emitter within the base formed by one of the P+ regions if the circuit device is an NPN transistor, or alternatively, a base contact within the epitaxial silicon layer if the circuit device is a lateral PNP transistor.

Contacts and conductors can then be formed in a conventional manner for the micromachine element and the integrated circuit device on the first field oxide layer. A cavity may then be defined through the second field oxide and in the opposite surface of the substrate, so as to form the micromachine element above or within the cavity.

For the bipolar process, an additional and preferred step includes forming isolation diffusions in the epitaxial silicon layer and between the micromachine element and the integrated circuit device prior to forming the P+ regions, for the purpose of electrically isolating the two devices. The substrate is preferably bonded to a wafer which preferably covers the cavity in the surface of the substrate and, if an absolute pressure sensor is formed by the micromachine element, hermetically seals the cavity.

In view of the above, it can be seen that with the preferred method a micromachine process can be fully integrated with a integrated circuit process by a technique in which the sensor's piezoresistors and the integrated circuit device's base are formed simultaneously. The preferred method is particularly suitable for forming micromachine sensing elements concurrently with bipolar processes, resulting in a fully integrated fabrication process requiring a minimal number of processing steps. Modifications of the processing steps allow the method to be readily adapted to CMOS and BiCMOS processes as well.

As additional advantages, the thickness of the epitaxial silicon layer can be varied to correspondingly affect the thickness of the micromachine element. The thickness of the micromachine element can be further tailored by forming one or more buried layers in the surface of a substrate. For example, use of an N+ buried layer will locally restrict the formation of the cavity when using an etchant which preferentially attacks P-doped silicon, such that the thickness of the micromachine element will be greater at the N+ buried layer than in the surrounding region. In contrast, a P+ buried layer will be preferentially etched, such that the thickness of the micromachined sensing structure will be correspondingly decreased where the P+ buried layer was formed. As a result, the size and shape of the cavity can be accurately defined by appropriately defining the size and location of the buried layer. Consequently, the configuration of the micromachine element can also be accurately predetermined, permitting the fabrication of an accurate sensing device.

The cavity may be electrochemically etched into the second field oxide layer. The P+ regions in the epitaxial silicon layer may be formed by ion implanting boron into

the epitaxial silicon layer. A passivation layer may be formed over the contacts and conductors.

An embodiment of the present invention is described below, by way of example only, with reference to the accompanying drawings, in which:

Figure 1 illustrates an embodiment of one-chip piezoresistive pressure sensing device;

Figures 2a through 2e illustrate an embodiment of bulk micromachining process by which a micromachine element is fabricated concurrently with a bipolar integrated circuit on the same substrate, so as to form the pressure sensing device of Figure 1;

Figures 3a and 3b illustrate a preferred use of buried layers in the bipolar integrated circuit and the micromachine element, respectively; and

Figure 4 illustrates an embodiment of one-chip capacitive accelerometer.

A method is provided by which a micromachine element can be accurately bulk micromachined in the surface of a silicon wafer concurrently with the fabrication of an integrated circuit device on the same substrate, such that a minimal number of processing steps are required to form a one-chip integrated sensor. Sensors which can be formed include piezoresistive pressure sensors and capacitive accelerometers, such as those illustrated in Figures 1 and 4, respectively, as well as piezoresistive accelerometers, though the bulk micromachining process described is generally applicable to the formation of substantially any micromachine element, such as a bridge, membrane, suspended mass, cantilevered beam or capacitive sensing element, at or under the surface of a silicon wafer. For clarity, the following description makes primary reference to the processing of the pressure sensor 10 shown in Figure 1, while comments concerning the accelerometer 110 of Figure 4 will be limited to the processing steps which differ from that of the pressure sensor 10.

In addition, the preferred embodiment generally encompasses the concurrent processing of a sensor and its control and temperature-compensating circuitry on a single substrate. The following description will focus on a bulk micromachining process which is integrated with a bipolar process. However, from the following discussion, those skilled in the art will appreciate the manner in which the described method can be extended to the integration of various types of sensors with both CMOS and BiCMOS processes.

Referring to Figure 1, the pressure sensor 10 is a piezoresistive pressure sensor, utilising a number of piezoresistors 14 formed in an epitaxial silicon layer 16. The piezoresistors 14 serve as the sensing elements for the sensor's micromachine element 54. As shown, the micromachine element 54 is a pressure sensing membrane composed of the epitaxial layer 16, an optional passivation layer, and an optional interlevel dielectric layer 28. Also as shown, the piezoresistors 14 are dif-

fused piezoresistors formed in the epitaxial layer 16 in accordance with known methods.

The sensor 10 is formed on the same substrate 18 as its control and compensation circuitry, which is illustrated here to include an NPN bipolar transistor 12. As is known in the art, P+ isolation diffusion 36 can be formed in the epitaxial layer 16 for junction isolation of the sensor 10 and transistor 12, while a deep N+ diffusion 42 can be formed in the epitaxial layer 16 to lower the collector resistance of the transistor 12. The substrate 18 is bonded to a glass or silicon wafer 20, such that a cavity 22 formed in the substrate 18 forms a chamber beneath the sensing membrane of the pressure sensor 10. As shown in Figure 1, the wafer 20 hermetically seals the cavity 22, such that the sensor 10 is an absolute pressure sensor. Alternatively, a hole could be provided through the wafer 20 to vent the cavity 22, such that the sensor 10 would be a differential pressure sensor capable of measuring a pressure difference between the front and rear of the sensor 10.

The epitaxial layer 16 serves as the collector for the NPN bipolar transistor 12, while a P+ region forms the transistor's base 30 and an N+ region within the base 30 forms the transistor's emitter 32. The P+ mask and etch process which forms the base 30 is used to form simultaneously the piezoresistors 14, such that two mask, etch and doping steps are combined into one. In addition, the N+ region which forms the emitter 32 also provides an ohmic contact for subsequent electrochemical etching steps.

This embodiment provides for the efficient processing of both the sensor 10 and the transistor 12 on the same chip by combining sensor and circuit processing steps, such that as few as seven masking levels are required to fabricate an integrated sensor. Electrochemical etching (ECE) is preferably used to produce the etched devices in the integrated process. Preferred circuits are electrically programmable at the package level for trimming without the need for laser trimming or wafer probe fuse blowing.

The preferred method for forming the pressure sensor 10 and NPN transistor 12 of Figure 1 is represented in Figures 2a to 2e. The process flow begins with a [100] p-type wafer which is polished on both the front and rear surfaces. As used here, the frontside of the wafer refers to the surface of a substrate 18 on which the sensor 10 and transistor 12 are to be fabricated, while the rear of the wafer refers to the opposite surface of the substrate 18 through which the cavity 22 is to be formed.

Preferably, the wafer is thinner than is conventional so as to reduce the time required for the bulk micromachining process, yet is sufficiently thick so as to permit handling, while the lateral dimensions of the wafer are generally large enough such that it can be subsequently diced into a number of individual chips. As an example, a suitable thickness for a 125 millimetre diameter wafer is about 0.38 to about 0.50 millimetre (about 0.015 to about 0.020 inch). As known to those skilled in the art, a [100] substrate 18 is used for the formation of the pie-

zoresistors 14. The substrate 18 is lightly-doped with a suitable dopant, such as the ions of boron or another trivalent element, so as to have a suitable acceptor concentration, as is also known in the art.

Preferably, the substrate 18 is laser scribed to aid in the dicing of the substrate 18 into a number of chips. Thereafter, the substrate 18 undergoes an initial oxidation, as is conventional. As shown in Figure 2a, an N+ region 34a may then be formed in the surface of the substrate 18, to eventually become an N+ buried layer 34 shown in Figure 2b. The N+ buried layer 34 is desirable for the purpose of lowering the collector resistance of the transistor 12. The N+ buried region 34a can be formed using various suitable techniques known to those skilled in the art, such as with a spin-on technique to deposit ions of arsenic, phosphorous, antimony or another pentavalent element on the substrate 18, followed by a high temperature drive to diffuse the doping ions into the substrate 18. As will be apparent to those skilled in the art, the inclusion of the N+ buried layer 34 in the substrate 18 is compatible with both bipolar and BiCMOS processes, which typically include an N+ buried layer under an epitaxial silicon layer.

Figure 3a further illustrates the use of buried layers with the transistor 12, including the N+ buried layer 34 noted above and a pair of P+ buried layers 62. As with the N+ buried layer 34, the P+ buried layers 62 are also formed in the surface of the substrate 18 prior to growing the epitaxial layer 16. As shown, the P+ buried layers 62 are each disposed beneath an isolation diffusion 36 for the purpose of providing junction isolation for thicker epitaxial layers 16. As will be discussed below with reference to Figure 3b, N+ and P+ buried layers can also be formed for the purpose of tailoring the dimensional characteristics of the sensor's micromachine element.

Whether or not N+ or P+ regions are formed in the substrate 18, fabrication of the sensor 10 and transistor 12 continues with the deposition of the epitaxial layer 16 on the front of the substrate 18, as shown in Figure 2b. In so doing, the epitaxial layer 16 buries the N+ region 34a shown in Figure 2a, thus establishing the N+ buried layer 34. As noted before, the epitaxial layer will form the collector for the NPN transistor 12, and as such, is lightly doped n-type. The epitaxial layer 16 can be formed in a conventional manner, with its thickness being tailored to the particular requirements of the application, though preferably on the order of about 5 to about 18 micrometers, and more preferably about 11.5 to about 13.5 micrometers in thickness, yielding a resistivity of about 1.0 to about 1.8 ohm-centimetres.

Referring now to Figure 2c, a field oxide layer 24 is grown or deposited in a conventional manner on the epitaxial layer 16. The field oxide layer 24 can be between about 500 nm (5000 Å) and about 1 µm (10,000 Å) thick, which is sufficient to provide a protective layer for the epitaxial layer 16 during the subsequent etching process in which the P+ isolation diffusions 36 are formed. The field oxide layer 24 can be conventionally patterned using a photoresist mask, and then etched to selectively remove

the field oxide layer 24 from each surface region of the epitaxial layer 16 which corresponds to the desired placement of the diffusions 36.

The P+ isolation diffusions 36 can be formed using various suitable techniques known to those skilled in the art, such as by known deposition and diffusion techniques. For example, boron can be deposited using boron nitride solid source doping or ion implanting. Thereafter, a high temperature drive is used to diffuse the boron dopant into the substrate 18 and thereby form the diffusions 36. The deep N+ diffusion 42 can also be formed at this time using a similar technique with an appropriate n-type dopant.

Advantageously, the high temperature drive required to form the P+ isolation diffusions 36 and the deep N+ diffusion 42 simultaneously grows a thick field oxide layer 38 on the backside of the substrate 18. The field oxide layer 38 preferably has a thickness on the order of about 1.5 μm (15,000 Å), and will later serve as part of an etch mask during etching of the cavity 22. This field oxide layer 38 will require protection during any wet oxide etching steps, such as those used to form the base 30 and emitter 32 for the transistor 12, as well as contacts for the sensor 10 and transistor 12.

The mask and etch for the piezoresistors 14 and the base 30 are then performed. As with the formation of the diffusions 36, the piezoresistors 14 and base 30 can be doped using a diffusion process or an implant. An optimum method is to use a photoresist mask to selectively remove the field oxide layer 24 from each surface region of the epitaxial layer 16 which corresponds to the desired placement of the piezoresistors 14 and the base 30, followed by a conventional pre-implant oxidation step so as to form an oxide layer (not shown) having a thickness of about 50 nm (500 Å) to about 100 nm (1000 Å). Thereafter, boron is ion implanted at 120 KeV and a dosage of about 1×10^{14} atoms/cm². At this level, the implanted boron will produce a resistance of approximately 200 to 400 ohms/square, which is suitable for both the piezoresistors 14 and the base 30.

A diffusion of about 850 to about 1000°C is then used to diffuse the boron dopant into the substrate 18 and thereby form the piezoresistors 14 and the base 30, as shown in Figure 2d. Importantly, the above technique combines the two mask, etch and doping steps for the piezoresistors 14 and base 30 into a single mask, etch and doping step, so as to integrate the fabrication of the sensor 10 with the bipolar process of the transistor 12.

At this point, circuit resistors (not shown) can be formed on the surface of the substrate 18 using conventional processing techniques. The circuit resistors formed exhibit high resistance, on the order of about 2000 to about 10,000 ohms/square. Preferably, the circuit resistors are not oriented along the [110] direction like the piezoresistors 14, but are oriented about 45 degrees from the flat in order to minimise the affect of mechanical stresses on their performance.

Following formation of the piezoresistors 14 and the base 30, the wafer is annealed at a suitable temperature,

such as about 850°C to about 1000°C. The mask and etch for the emitter 32 are then performed. As with the formation of the piezoresistors 14 and base 30, the emitter 32 can be formed using a photoresist mask to selectively remove the field oxide layer 24 from each surface region of the epitaxial layer 16 which corresponds to the desired placement of the emitter 32, followed by doping with phosphorus or arsenic by ion implantation, solid diffusion source, or gaseous POCl₃ diffusion, with phosphorus being the preferred dopant.

A high temperature drive is then used to diffuse the dopant into the substrate 18 and thereby form the emitter 32, as shown in Figure 2d. A thin field oxide layer which is simultaneously grown on the epitaxial layer 16 during diffusion of the emitter 32 can be used to form capacitors (not shown).

With reference now to Figure 2e, the contacts for the sensor 10 and the transistor 12 can then be formed using conventional mask and etch techniques. The thick field oxide 24 is preferably etched from the surface of the epitaxial layer 16 in the region which will define the micromachine element 54, so as to avoid film stress effects. An aluminium metal film is then deposited, masked and etched to form interconnects 40 for the sensor 10 and transistor 12. A passivation layer may then be deposited to protect the underlying metal film and circuitry. Alternatively, and as shown in Figure 2e, the metal film can be followed by deposition of the interlevel dielectric layer 28. Vias are then etched through the dielectric layer 28, after which a second metal film 46 can be deposited to form a second circuitry layer, so as to allow for denser circuitry on the substrate 18. This process can be repeated if additional circuitry layers are desired. The interlevel dielectric layer 28 is preferably an oxide or nitride, in that polyimide is generally incapable of withstanding the temperatures required for subsequently bonding the wafer 20 to the substrate 18. A final oxide or passivation layer 48, preferably plasma nitride, can then be formed over the metal film 46, masked and etched in a conventional manner to open metal pads 50 to the second metal film 46, so as to permit testing of the sensor 10 and transistor 12 at this level, if desired. At this point, the interlevel dielectric layer 28 and the passivation layer 48 may be removed from above the region which is to form the micromachine element 54, for the purpose of fabricating a low pressure sensor or a low-g accelerometer.

Next, a thick plasma nitride film 52, on the order of about 1 μm (10,000 Å) to about 1.5 μm (15,000 Å), is deposited over the field oxide layer 38 on the backside of the substrate 18. The plasma nitride film 52 and the field oxide layer 38 are then etched, as shown in Figure 2e, preferably with a dry etch due to the thicknesses of the layers to be etched. The rear of the substrate 18 can then be electrochemically etched to form the cavity 22 and thereby delineate the micromachine pressure sensing membrane 54 for the sensor 10, shown in Figure 1.

A preferred electrochemical etch process uses a 20 percent KOH aqueous solution at about 88°C, using an

endpoint detection system as is known in the art, though other electrochemical etching solutions could be used, such as NaOH, tetramethyl alcohol hydroxide (TMAH) and hydrazine. The preferred electrochemical etch process serves to preferentially etch the p-type silicon of the substrate 18 while stopping at the n-type epitaxial layer 16. The emitter 32 is used to make ohmic contact to the epitaxial layer 16 during the etching process.

Finally, the glass or silicon safer 20 is bonded to the rear of the substrate 18 to enclose the cavity 22 and form a reference vacuum chamber for the sensing membrane 54 and to aid in isolating packaging stresses. As shown, the wafer 20 hermetically seals the cavity 22 to enable the sensor 10 to serve as an absolute pressure sensor though, as noted above, the cavity 22 could be vented through the wafer 20 to enable the sensor 10 to serve as a differential pressure sensor.

Thereafter, generally conventional processes can be used to complete the fabrication and implementation of the sensor 10 and transistor 12. Individual chips can be sawed from the wafer by which the substrate 18 is formed. Preferably, die attachment at packaging uses a soft adhesive such as an RTV or silicone-based glue. The adhesive preferably has a low Young's modulus to prevent packaging stresses from interacting with the sensing membrane 54. Wirebonding is then performed to link the individual chips to their packages. Solder attachment is preferably avoided to reduce stress on the sensing membrane 54. Finally, the chips are tested and programmed using any suitable method. The use of logic circuits and programmable links allow testing and programming to be performed at the package level without the use of laser or abrasion trimming, and without a previous fuse blowing operation during wafer testing.

The above processing completes the processing for the pressure sensor 10 of Figure 1. As those skilled in the art will recognise, a lateral PNP transistor (not shown) can be fabricated along with or instead of the NPN transistor 12 shown in Figure 1. More specifically, if the integrated circuit device is a lateral PNP bipolar transistor, the epitaxial silicon layer 16 serves to form the base for the transistor, two P+ regions are formed in the epitaxial layer 16 to define the emitter and collector, and an N+ region is then formed in the epitaxial layer 16 so as to form a base contact.

Forming an accelerometer instead of pressure sensor also entails nearly an identical process to that described above, but differs in that the process of forming the cavity 22 includes delineation of a suspended beam or mass. For a piezoresistive accelerometer (not shown), the cavity 22 is further delineated with a plasma silicon etched through the epitaxial silicon layer 16 to form a cantilevered beam which terminates in a large deflectable proof mass suspended within the cavity 22. Piezoresistors 14 are formed in the beam to detect the deflection of the beam caused by acceleration forces on the proof mass. An additional wafer can be bonded to the front of the substrate 18 to protect the proof mass, to improve its damping characteristics, and to act as a g-stop to prevent

excessive deflection. Holes are preferably etched in the front wafer to allow wire bonding to the sensor 10.

For the capacitive accelerometer shown in Figure 4, a plasma silicon etch is again used to delineate a cantilevered beam which terminates in a large deflectable proof mass 60 suspended within the cavity 22. A metal plate pattern 58a is formed on the upper surface of the proof mass 60 in a conventional manner. An additional wafer 56 which is equipped with a metal plate pattern 58b is then bonded to the front of the substrate 18, so as to capacitively mate the plate patterns 58a and 58b, as shown in Figure 4, to form a capacitive sensing element. Metal-to-metal bonding can be used to bond the top wafer 56 to the substrate 18.

Further modifications of the processing method are illustrated in Figures 3a and 3b. As discussed above, Figure 3a illustrates the manner in which the performance of the NPN transistor 12 is improved by employing buried layers beneath the epitaxial layer 16. The N+ buried layer 34 is desirable for the purpose of lowering the collector resistance of the transistor 12, while the P+ buried layers 62 serve to enhance the electrical isolation of the transistor 12 from adjacent devices on the substrate 18.

Figure 3b illustrates the use of N+ and P+ buried layers 34 and 62 to selectively vary the diaphragm or beam thickness of the micromachine element of a sensor, whether the sensor is a pressure sensor such as the sensor 10 of Figure 1 or an accelerometer such as the capacitive accelerometer 110 of Figure 4. Thickness of a micromachine element 54 can be selectively varied using N+ and P+ buried layers 34 and 62 because the electrochemical etch preferentially will remove the p-type silicon of the P+ buried layer 62 and leave the n-type silicon of the N+ buried layer 34, as indicated in Figure 3b. As a result, the presence of the N+ buried layer 34 will result in a thicker section through the micromachine element 54, such that the micromachine element 54 will be better suited for sensing high pressures if the element 54 serves as a pressure sensor membrane, or high accelerations if the element 54 serves as an accelerometer beam.

In contrast, the P+ buried layer 62 will be etched away with the p-type substrate 18, resulting in a thinner micromachine element 54, such that the micromachine element 54 will be better suited for sensing lower pressures if the element 54 serves as a pressure sensor membrane, or lower accelerations if the element 54 serves as an accelerometer beam. Though not shown in Figure 3b, the N+ diffusion 42 of Figure 1 could also be employed to vary the thickness of the micromachine element 54.

Finally, while the above processing method is directed to the integration of a micromachining process with a bipolar process, it can be extended to CMOS and BiCMOS processes as well. The differences and similarities between the bipolar process described in detail above and CMOS and BiCMOS processes integrated with the described micromachining process are noted below.

For a CMOS process, processing is essentially unchanged until the diffusion isolation level, which is unnecessary for a CMOS process. Instead, a p-well is formed in the n-type epitaxial layer 16 by conventional mask and diffusion methods, including the formation of a thick field oxide layer and use of a high temperature drive to diffuse the p-type dopants to form the p-well. Furthermore, at the level at which the P+ base 30 would be formed, the gate oxide for the CMOS device is grown, followed by a polysilicon deposition and mask to form the gate for each field effect transistor of the CMOS device, and then formation of the source and drain for each field effect transistor using n-type and p-type dopants. However, as with the bipolar process, the p-type dopant is simultaneously used to form the piezoresistors for the micromachine element of the sensor. Thereafter, essentially identical processing steps can be performed to complete the fabrication of the sensor and CMOS device. Notably, the polysilicon layer can be employed to form stress isolated circuit resistors.

As with the CMOS process, integration of a BiCMOS process with the described micromachining process is substantially the same as that for the bipolar process until the P+ isolation diffusion level, at which point both p-wells and isolation diffusions are formed simultaneously. After the well drive and gate oxidation steps, the base for the bipolar device and the piezoresistors for the sensor are formed in accordance with the prior description of the bipolar process. Following deposition of the polysilicon, the N+ source and drain are formed for the n-MOS device and the emitter is formed for the bipolar device, followed by the formation of the P+ source and drain for the p-MOS device. Thereafter, substantially identical processing steps can be performed to complete the fabrication of the sensor and BiCMOS device.

From the above, it can be seen that the described method teaches a bulk micromachining process which can be fully integrated with bipolar processes, as well as CMOS and BiCMOS processes. More particularly, the described method is particularly adapted for forming micromachine sensing elements concurrently with bipolar processes, resulting in a fully integrated fabrication process requiring a minimal number of processing steps, while modifications of the processing steps allow the method to be readily adapted to CMOS and BiCMOS processes as well. Additional advantages include the ability to selectively alter the thickness of the micromachine element by forming one or more buried layers in the surface of a substrate, such that the size and shape of the micromachine element can be accurately defined so as to enable the fabrication of an accurate sensing device.

It should also be noted that the described method could also be employed in conjunction with the above integrated circuit processes to fabricate micromachine elements other than the pressure sensing and accelerometer devices described above.

The disclosures in United States patent application no. 08/305,550, from which this application claims prior-

ity, and in the abstract accompanying this application are incorporated herein by reference.

Claims

1. A method of forming a one-chip integrated sensor including a micromachined sensing structure which is concurrently formed with an integrated circuit device on a single substrate, the method comprising the steps of:
 - forming an n-type epitaxial silicon layer (16) on a first surface of the substrate (18);
 - growing a first field oxide layer (24) on the epitaxial silicon layer and a second field oxide layer (38) on a second surface of the substrate opposite the first surface;
 - forming P+ regions in the epitaxial silicon layer so as to form concurrently at least one element (30) of the integrated circuit device and a piezoresistor (14) for the micromachined sensing structure;
 - forming an N+ region in the epitaxial silicon layer so as to form a second element (32) of the integrated circuit device;
 - forming contacts and conductors (40) for the micromachined sensing structure and the integrated circuit device on the first field oxide layer; and
 - forming a cavity (22) through the second field oxide layer (38) and in the second surface of the substrate such that the cavity delineates the micromachined sensing structure.
2. A method according to claim 1, wherein the N+ region forms an ohmic contact to the epitaxial silicon layer (16).
3. A method according to claim 1 or 2, comprising the step of forming an isolation diffusion (36) in the epitaxial silicon layer (16) and between the micromachined sensing structure (54) and the integrated circuit device (12).
4. A method according to any preceding claim, wherein the substrate (18) is a [100] p-type wafer.
5. A method according to any preceding claim, wherein the integrated circuit device (18) is an NPN transistor, the epitaxial silicon layer (16) forming a collector for the NPN transistor, one of the P+ regions in the epitaxial silicon layer forming a base (30) for the NPN transistor, and the N+ region being formed in the base so as to form an emitter (32) for the NPN transistor.
6. A method according to any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein the integrated circuit device is a lateral PNP transistor, the epitaxial silicon layer (18) forming a base for the lateral PNP transistor, a first of the P+ regions in the epitaxial silicon layer forming an emitter for the lateral PNP transistor, a second of the P+

- regions in the epitaxial silicon layer forming a collector for the lateral PNP transistor, and the N+ region being formed outside the P+ regions so as to form a base contact for the lateral PNP transistor.
7. A method according to any one of claims 1 to 4, wherein a first of the P+ regions in the epitaxial silicon layer forms a source and a second of the P+ regions in the epitaxial silicon layer forms a drain for a first field-effect transistor (12), the N+ region being formed within a third of the P+ regions, the third P+ region being a p-well such that the N+ region forms a source for a second field effect transistor, and further comprising the steps of forming a second N+ region within the p-well so as to form a drain for the second field effect transistor, and forming a polysilicon layer so as to form a gate for each of the first and second field effect transistors.
 8. A method according to claim 7, comprising the step of forming circuit resistors from the polysilicon layer.
 9. A method according to any preceding claim, comprising the step of forming the epitaxial silicon layer so as to effect the thickness of the micromachined sensing structure.
 10. A method according to any preceding claim, comprising the step of forming a buried layer (34, 62) in the surface of the substrate.
 11. A method according to claim 10, wherein the buried layer (34) is an N+ buried layer, and wherein the step of forming the cavity (22) is restricted by the presence of the N+ buried layer, such that the thickness of the micromachined sensing structure is increased.
 12. A method according to claim 10, wherein the buried layer is a P+ buried layer (62), and wherein the step of forming the cavity results in the P+ buried layer being removed, such that the thickness of the micromachined sensing structure is decreased.
 13. A method according to any preceding claim, comprising the step of bonding a wafer (20) to the second surface of the substrate so as to enclose the cavity (22).
 14. A method according to claim 13, wherein the wafer (20) seals the cavity (22) such that the micromachined sensing structure forms a diaphragm of an absolute pressure sensor (10).
 15. A method according to any one of claims 1 to 13, wherein the micromachined sensing structure forms a proof mass (60) of an accelerometer (110).
 16. A method according to claim 15, wherein the accelerometer is a piezoresistive accelerometer.
 17. A method according to claim 15 or 16, comprising the steps of:
 - forming a first metal pattern (58a) on the proof mass (60); and
 - bonding a second wafer (56) on a surface of the one-chip integrated sensor corresponding to the first surface of the substrate (18), the second wafer including a second metal pattern (58b) formed thereon, the first and second metal patterns forming a capacitive accelerometer.

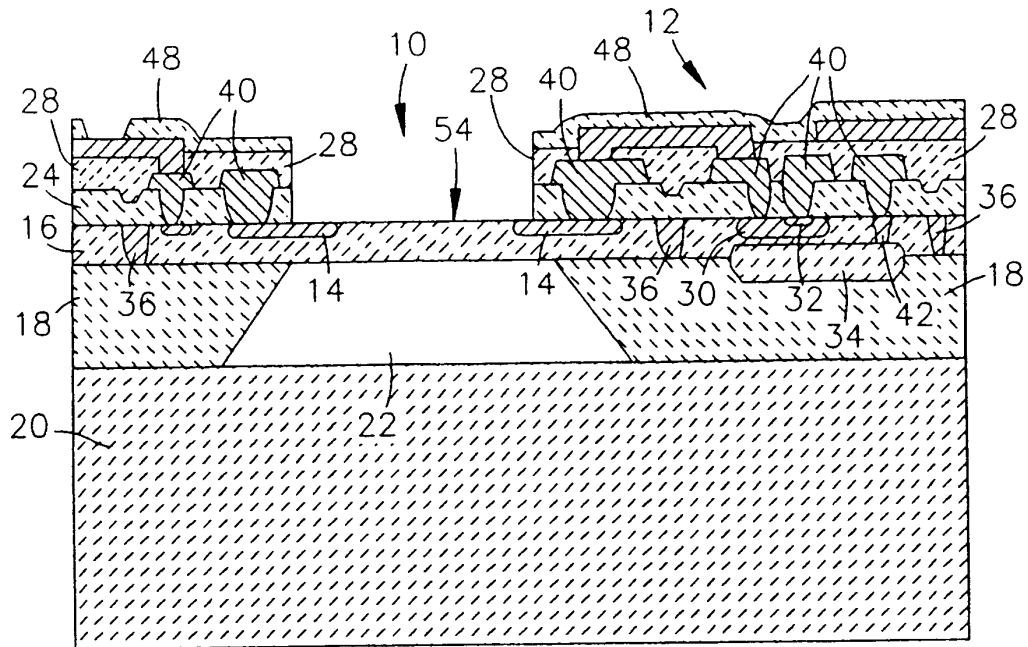


FIG. 1

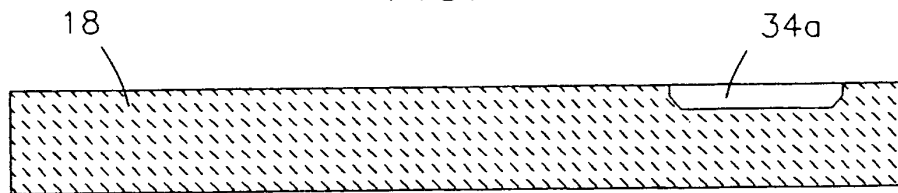


FIG. 2a

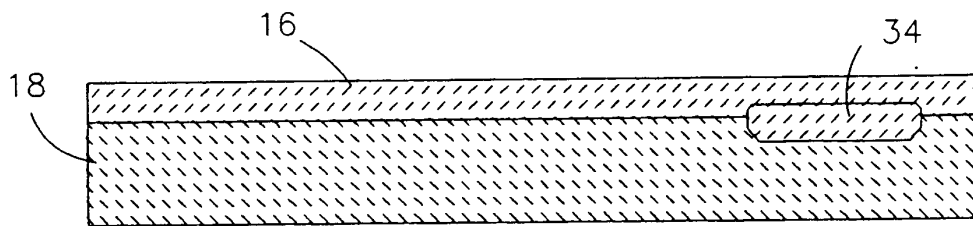


FIG. 2b

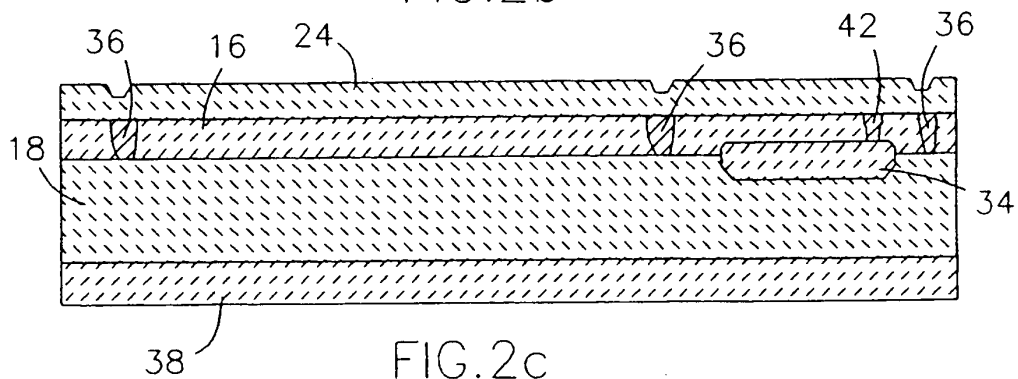


FIG. 2c

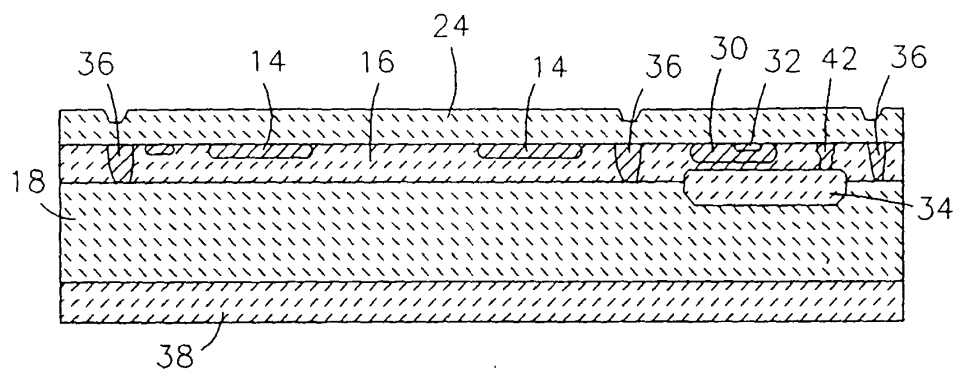


FIG. 2d

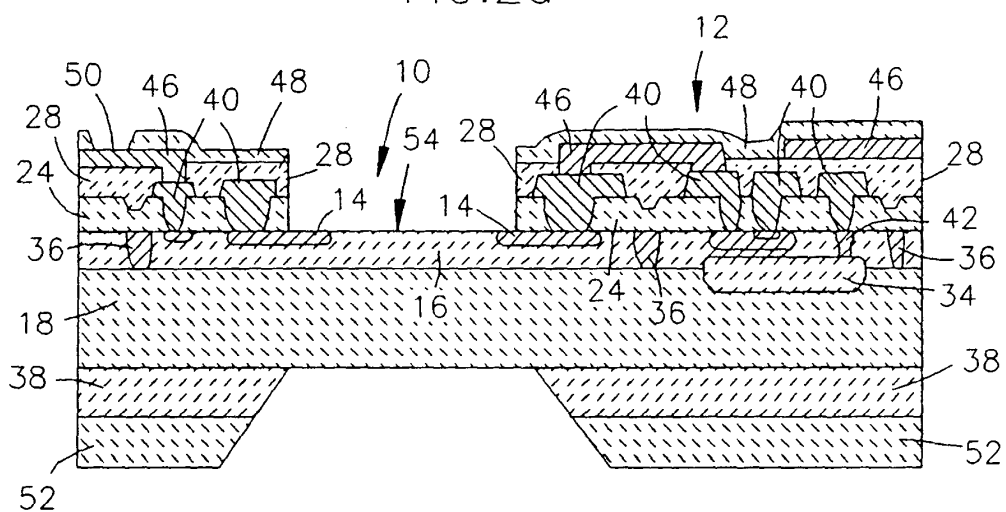


FIG. 2e

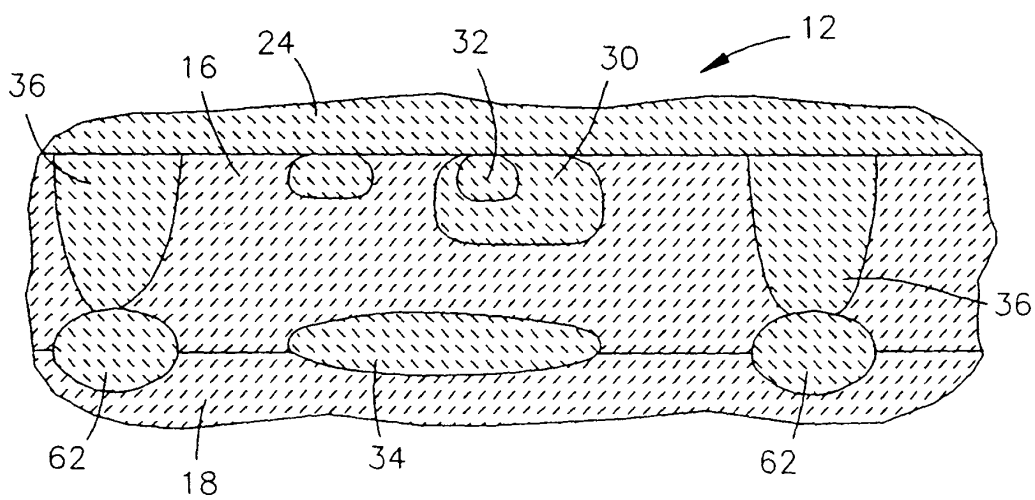


FIG. 3a

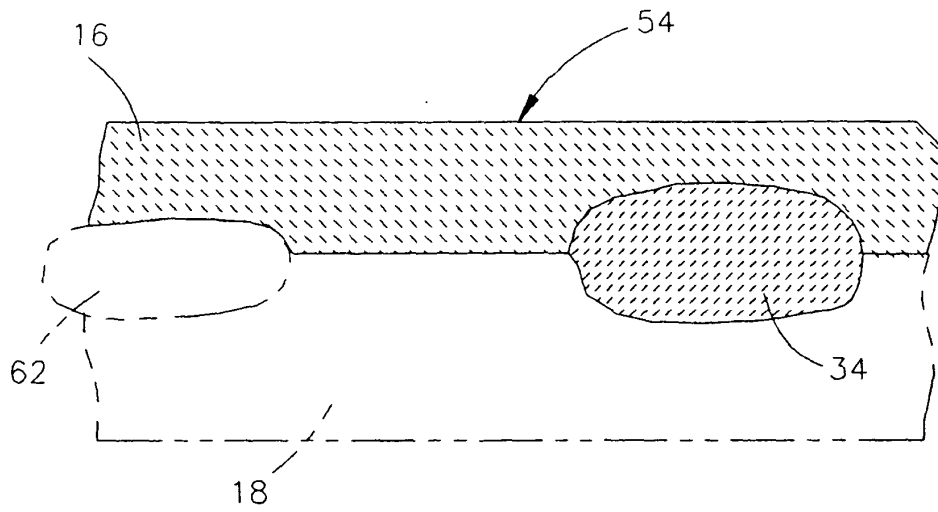


FIG. 3b

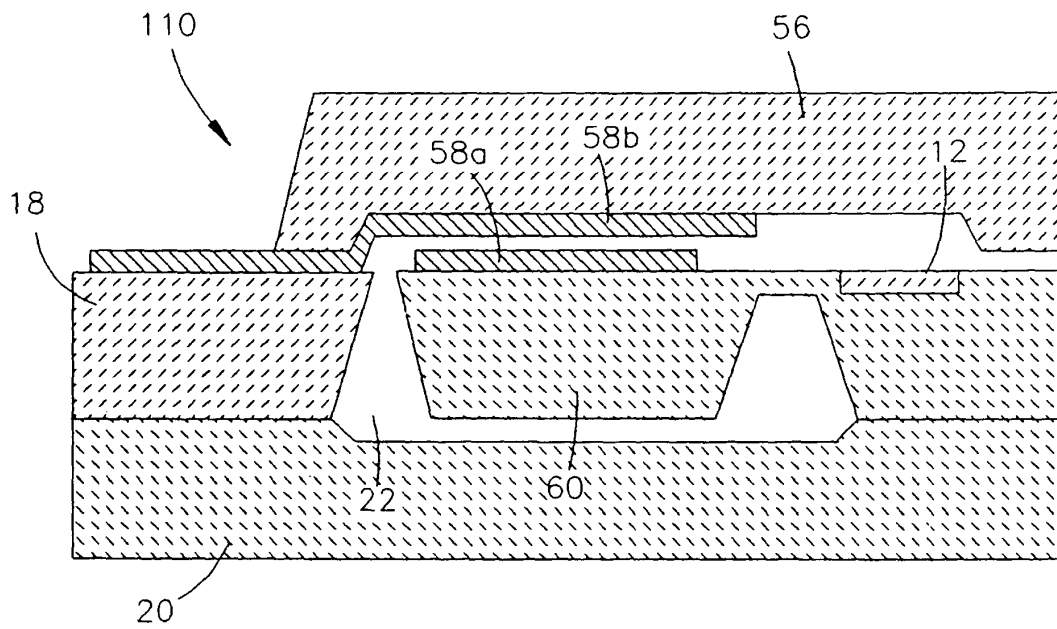
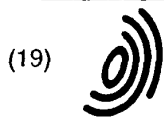


FIG. 4



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(54) One-chip integrated sensor

(57) A method concurrently forms a micromachine element (54) and an integrated circuit device (12) on the same substrate (18), such that their fabrication requires a minimal number of processing steps. The method can form sensing devices, such as accelerometers (110) and pressure sensors (54) which utilise a small micromachine element, such as a bridge (54), cantilevered beam, suspended mass (60), membrane or capacitive element that is supported over a cavity (22) formed in the silicon substrate (18). Piezoresistors (14) used to detect the deflection of the micromachine element (54, 60) are formed simultaneously with elements of the integrated circuit devices (12), such that a minimal number of processing steps are required.

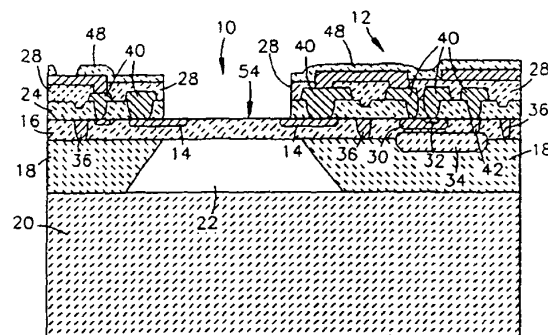


FIG. 1

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EUROPEAN SEARCH REPORT

Application Number
EP 95 20 2247

DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT			
Category	Citation of document with indication, where appropriate, of relevant passages	Relevant to claim	CLASSIFICATION OF THE APPLICATION (Int.Cl.6)
Y	TECHNISCHE RUNDSCHAU, vol. 81, no. 35, 1 September 1981, BERN (CH), pages 100-105, XP000068272 KAYAL ET AL: "ANWENDUNGSSPEZIFISCHE INTELLIGENTE SENSOREN - MECHATRONIK EN MINIATUR" * page 103, column 1, line 32 - page 103, column 1, line 64; figure 7 *	1-14	G01L9/06 G01P15/08 G01L9/00 G01P15/12 G01P15/125
Y	DE 34 19 710 A (KABUSHIKI KAISHA TOYOTA CHOU KENKYUSHO) * page 15, line 1-25; figure 7 *	1-14	
A	US 5 324 688 A (YUJI KONDO) * column 4, line 6 - column 5, line 47; figures 3,4 *	15,16	
A	WO 91 11722 A (SENSOR A.S.) * page 3, line 3-12 * * page 4, line 13-23; figures 1,2 *	16,17	
			TECHNICAL FIELDS SEARCHED (Int.Cl.6)
			G01L G01P
The present search report has been drawn up for all claims			
Place of search THE HAGUE		Date of completion of the search 4 March 1997	Examiner Hansen, P
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EPO FORM 1503 (03/82) (P04C01)



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CLAIMS INCURRING FEES

The present European patent application comprised at the time of filing more than ten claims

- ☐ All claims fees have been paid within the prescribed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for all claims.
- ☐ Only part of the claims fees have been paid within the prescribed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for the first ten claims and for those claims for which claims fees have been paid, namely claims:
- ☐ No claims fees have been paid within the prescribed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for the first ten claims.

LACK OF UNITY OF INVENTION

The Search Division considers that the present European patent application does not comply with the requirement of unity of invention and relates to several inventions or groups of inventions, namely:

See sheet -B-

- ☒ All further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for all claims.
- ☐ Only part of the further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for those parts of the European patent application which relate to the inventions in respect of which search fees have been paid, namely claims:
- ☐ None of the further search fees have been paid within the fixed time limit. The present European search report has been drawn up for those parts of the European patent application which relate to the invention first mentioned in the claims, namely claims:



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EP 95 20 2247 -B-

LACK OF UNITY OF INVENTION

The Search Division considers that the present European patent application does not comply with the requirement of unity of invention and relates to several inventions or groups of inventions, namely:

1. Claims 1-14 : Method of forming a one-chip integrated sensor and application as a pressure sensor.
2. Claims 15-17 : Acceleration sensor.